THESE TIKTOKERS ARE REDEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO GET SOBER

The new faces of the sober curiosity movement are younger, more inclusive, and way more realistic.

TikTok / Notorious Cree
SOBRIETY CHECK
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3.7.2022

Growing up, when I thought of 12-step groups like AA, I always imagined grisly old men chugging coffee in smoke-filled rooms. So when I wanted to get sober later in my life, I just assumed that traditional addiction recovery groups weren't my scene. When I went to my first AA meeting in 2018, I discovered that I wasn't far off the mark. Even though the meeting I went to was LGBTQ+, I still found myself part of a young queer minority. Thankfully, these TikTok creators are changing the face of sobriety for the next generation of sober curious people.

One of the coolest things about sober TikTok is that you get the nuance of what sobriety looks like for different people. Rio Romeo, a 23-year-old TikTok creator in California, has been documenting their sobriety journey since the beginning. But the thing is that Romeo is an actual creative, so their TikToks about quitting drinking are interspersed with snippets of music they're making, road trips they're taking, feminist rants, and sweet sweet queer romance. Romeo definitely shows their audience that one of the benefits of being alcohol-free is living a big, adventurous life.

I love the phrase "sober curious," because it centers curiosity — something that feels more organic and accessible than hard-and-fast rules that sobriety has historically been associated with. Jordan Grainger is a 23-year-old TikToker in Seattle who satisfies that curiosity by making TikToks about all of her routines and life experiments, from trying press-on nails to quitting drinking. She makes earnest TikToks about why she became curious about sobriety and what she's learned about herself and way she uses

substances along the way, but she also isn't shy about telling her audience about the drawbacks. In one TikTok, Grainger admits that her weekends aren't as exciting as they used to be, but that she still wouldn't trade them out for her old hungover mornings.

The way that TikTokers show the whole rollercoaster of sober life — from euphoric moments of revelation that things need to change to the terrifying temptation to relapse — is refreshing because die-hard abstinence-only enthusiasts sometimes have a tendency to gloss over the reality that there can be very real downsides to sobriety. While romanticizing sober life is tempting, someone who is genuinely curious about reconsidering their relationship with substances probably wants to know the whole truth. James Jones, also known on social media as Notorious Cree, is an indigenous educator and activist whose relatable TikToks make sobriety out to be the adventure it can be.

Seeing the whole truth of someone's recovery journey can be scary, but the fact that these people are willing to be candid and vulnerable about their lives in recovery makes them feel trustworthy, and watching their stories seems like a window into real life. K is a TikToker who's kept her biographical details anonymous, but has been extremely explicit about her struggles with both mental health and addiction. She reads her private journals and, while it is honestly terrifying to hear all the things this fresh-faced beauty has been through, it's heartening and inspiring to see how balanced and healthy she looks now.

As I investigate these entertaining, funny, and soul-tugging sobriety TikToks, I can't help but feel a little envious. How different might my life have been if I had thought there was anything interesting or cool about being sober before I was over 30? Would I have come out of the closet sooner instead of drowning myself in drugs if I had had accessible queer sober role models? I can't know, but I have a lot of hope for the young people who now have more access to other young people that talk frankly about mental health, addiction, and recovery.